



H.E. Holmes

Livable Centers Initiative

Study and Concept Plan

City of Atlanta
November 26, 2002



H.E. Holmes Livable Communities Initiative
Study and Concept Plan Project Team

Planning Team

City of Atlanta

C.T. Martin, Council Member District 10

NPU I, chairperson Andrew Fellens

NPU H, chairperson Larry Phillips, Sr.

Beverley Dockeray-Ojo, MCIP, AICP, Acting Director,
Redevelopment Planning
Flor Velarde AICP, Principal Planner
Garnett Brown, Principal Planner
Stephanie Macari, Senior Planner
Chuck Shultz, Senior Planner

Consultants



Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, Inc
US Infrastructure- Subconsultant
Marketek- Subconsultant

Shirley Franklin
Mayor, City of Atlanta



Atlanta City Council
Cathy Woolard
President of Council

Carla Smith
Debi Starnes
Ivory Young, Jr.
Cleta Winslow
Natalyn Archibong
Ann Fauver
Howard Shook
Clair Muller
Felicia Moore
C.T. Martin
Jim Maddox
Derrick Boazman
Ceasar Mitchell
Mary Norwood
H. Lamar Willis

Department of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Conservation
Charles Graves, Commissioner

Bureau of Planning
Beverly Dockeray-Ojo, Acting Director

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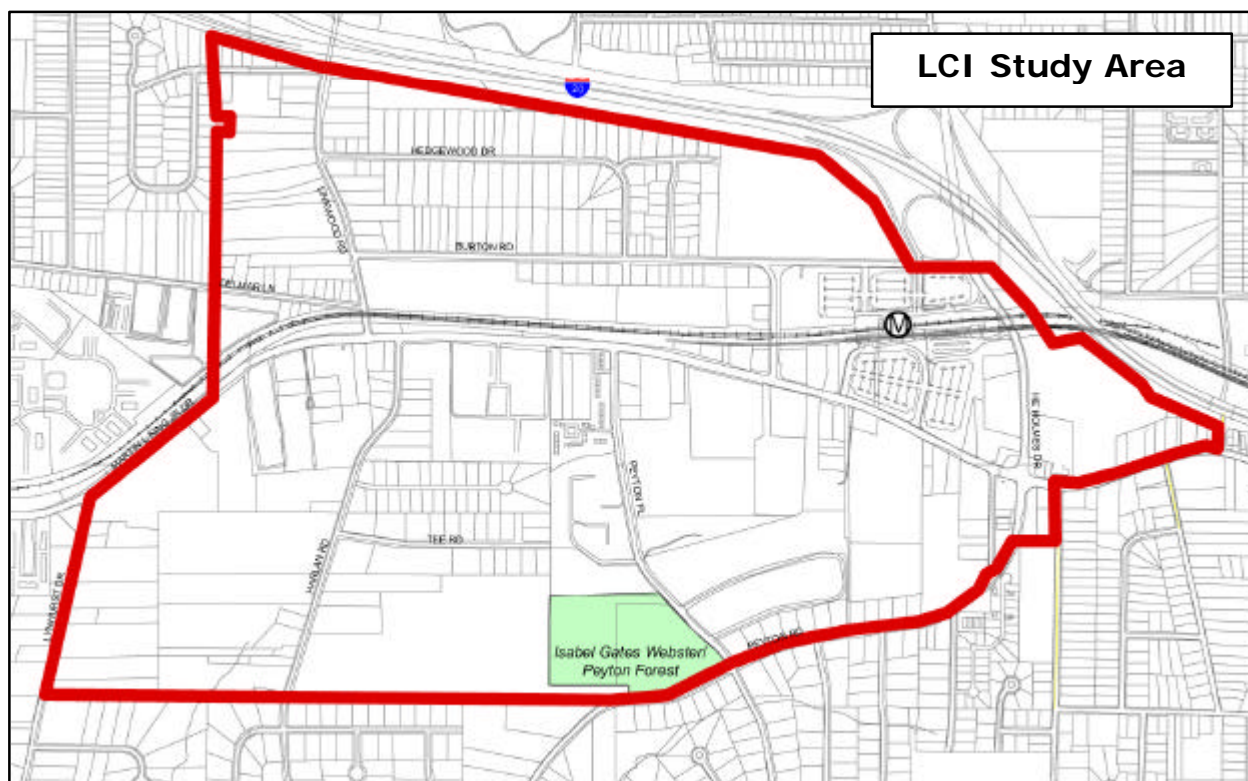
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INTRODUCTION

Livable Centers Initiative

The LCI program is intended to promote greater livability, mobility and development alternatives in existing employment and town centers. The rationale is that directing development towards areas with existing infrastructure will benefit the region and minimize sprawling land use patterns. Minimizing sprawl, in turn, will potentially reduce the amount of vehicle miles traveled and the air pollution associated with those miles. Lastly, the LCI program is using the successful 1996 Olympics model to promote the concept that investment in public infrastructure will spur private investment. Thus, the LCI program is a vehicle whereby the ARC can attempt to direct mixed-use and mixed income development towards existing infrastructure by providing study and implementation dollars.

In this context the City of Atlanta saw a great opportunity to study the area surrounding the H.E. Holmes MARTA station. The area has existing infrastructure that can support development of vacant lands and redevelopment/reuse of existing facilities. The H.E. Holmes MARTA station area is in close proximity to downtown Atlanta, Hartsfield International Airport and the growing residential areas of south Fulton County, eastern Douglas County, and south Cobb County.



Study Area

The H.E. Holmes Study Area is a proposed regional level activity center. This proposed activity center is located at the intersection of I-20 and Holmes Drive (formerly Hightower Drive). However, the proposed Study Area includes a larger area to ensure that the connectivity between major users and activities within the area is considered. The Study Area is bounded by I-20 on the north; the properties fronting Linkwood Road and Lynhurst Road on the west; Peyton Forest Elementary School and Peyton Road on the South; and Fairfield Land and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive on the East. The area is approximately 496.5 acres or 0.8 square miles. The entire area is within NPU I, however residents from NPU H and other nearby neighborhoods utilize the services present here.

Study Area Analysis

The area's regional access remains strong via I-285, I-20, and the MARTA east-west rail line. Major employment cores, including Fulton Industrial Boulevard, the Airport, and Downtown are also easily accessed from the area. However, the ability of retail users to capitalize on this regional access is compromised by poor visibility from adjacent transportation corridors and the proximity and strength of existing retail centers on Cascade Road and Thornton Road in nearby Douglas County.

The area has not experienced the full effects of the trend for intown living and community revitalization sweeping much of the City of Atlanta. Although some new residential development exists near and within the Study Area, the area remains under-developed. This may be largely attributed to the area's more suburban character when compared to other intown neighborhoods.

The area is relatively disjointed because of previous transportation projects that bisected neighborhoods, including the construction of I-20 and I-285. The area also lacks a cohesive mix of uses. The area surrounding the MARTA station lacks a sense of place or community. There are no community gathering places, pedestrian friendly walkways connecting residential and commercial areas, community focal points, or appropriately designed and engaging sidewalk experiences.

The City of Atlanta recognizes a variety of activity centers, which range in size, scope, role and function. Most development nodes are adjacent to MARTA stations. Other nodes were proposed at certain freeway interchanges, including the H.E. Holmes Study Area. The Atlanta Regional

Commission (ARC) has designated H.E. Holmes as a typical example of an Activity Center, anticipating its location as the hub for the southwest Atlanta and growing South Fulton County. These centers have the potential to encourage a wider range of mixed uses, a more balanced ratio of jobs and residential units, higher order of civic space and community identity. This will ultimately transform auto-oriented centers into more transit and pedestrian friendly environment.

Components

The major components of this proposed activity center include the intersection of Holmes Drive and MLK Jr Drive as the focal point, in addition to the MLK Jr Drive commercial corridor, the H.E. Holmes MARTA Station and the adjacent residential neighborhoods. The residential part of the Southwest neighborhoods is primarily comprised of single-family residential homes along local streets to the north of MLK Drive, and commercial and multifamily residential to the south of MLK Drive.

H.E. Holmes MARTA Rail Station:

The Holmes Station is bordered by MLK Drive to the south, H.E. Holmes Drive to the east, Burton Road to the north, and Westland Boulevard to the west.

Shopping Centers:

All three of the main shopping centers are currently managed by Halpern Enterprises. Information about Halpern's properties can be accessed at <http://www.halpern-online.com>

West Ridge

West Ridge shopping center is located on MLK Drive at Lynhurst. Newly re-developed, West Ridge offers a strong mix of both retail and service businesses. The center is anchored by Save Rite Grocery Warehouse and Family Dollar.

Hightower Station Shopping Center

Hightower Station is located at 3050 MLK Drive, across from the H.E. Holmes MARTA station. Hightower Station contains a strong mix of both retail and service businesses.

Gordon Plaza Shopping Center

Located at the corner of Peyton Road and MLK Drive, Gordon Plaza is strategically situated between H.E. Holmes Drive and the MARTA station.

METHODOLOGY

The H.E. Holmes LCI study adhered to the following process:

Data Gathering

An LCI Study Team consisting of members of the City of Atlanta Bureau of Planning, Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, Marketek, and USInfrastructure conducted site visits and public meetings, utilized GIS data, conducted market, demographic and transportation analyses, and employed concepts and data from previous planning-related studies pertaining to the area to produce this document.

Public Participation

The public participation process consisted of an intense five-month period of biweekly stakeholder meetings and a concept plan workshop. These meetings helped to define major goals, create a vision and develop a concept plan for the Study Area. Each meeting was preceded by a printed advertisement delivered via post and e-mail. Over 60 stakeholders participated in this process, including area residents, property owners, business owners, neighborhood representatives, non-profit organization representatives, NPU chairpersons and members, City Council members, and other interested parties. Advisory committee and community meetings covered the following topics:

- Kick-Off
- Visioning and Goal Setting
- Land Use Focus Group
- Transportation Focus Group
- Housing Focus Group
- Urban Design Focus Group
- Economic Development Focus Group
- Preliminary Findings/Concept Plan Workshop
- Concept Review
- Implementation Projects Workshop
- Review of Draft Document & Prioritization of Implementation Projects
- Review of Final Report



Participants discuss plans at the October workshop

These meetings resulted in the following vision and goals for the H.E. Holmes LCI Study Area:

Vision:

A community vision was developed as follows:

"The area surrounding the H.E. Holmes MARTA station should have large numbers of people living, working and playing within walking distance of this medium density mixed-use transportation node. A wider variety of goods, services and recreational facilities should be available within the center. Improved pedestrian circulation and sense of community should be achieved through integration of multi-use trails, parks and open space with connections to existing facilities. There should also be equity in access to services in the area, and a balanced ratio of jobs and residential units."

Goals:

The proposed study will accomplish the following:

1. Encourage a diversity of medium to high-density mixed income housing areas, employment, institutional, shopping, and recreation choices in the Study Area. Develop alternatives for underutilized or vacant property and conserve natural resources.
2. Develop streetscape, bicycle and pedestrian linkages and provide access to a range of travel modes including transit, roadways, walking and biking to enable access to all uses within the Study Area.
3. Encourage integration of uses with transportation investments to maximize the use of alternate modes.
4. Through transportation investments increase the desirability of redevelopment of land served by existing infrastructure within the Study Area.
5. Create a community identity via creation of gateways.
6. Develop a community-based transportation investment program that will identify capital projects, which can be funded in the annual TIP.
7. Provide transportation infrastructure incentives that help implement the study goals such as reduced parking requirements for medium & high-density developments and shared parking options.

8. Provide for the implementation of the RDP policies, quality growth initiatives and best development practices in the Study Area.
9. Develop a local planning outreach process that promotes the involvement of all stakeholders.
10. Create a development plan that showcases the integration of land use policy and transportation investments with urban design tools.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section reviews Issues and Opportunities identified at community meetings and through analysis of the site by LCI Study Team. Issues include areas of special concern or consideration having a detrimental impact on the Study Area, while Opportunities are those existing or potential projects that could address the identified Issues. Issues and Opportunities identified were further reviewed and incorporated into the Concept Plan, as appropriate.

Transportation

Transportation is an important component of the H.E. Holmes LCI study. As presented in the project kickoff meeting¹, transportation is a component of several of the ten goals set for the LCI. In particular, Goal #6 describes the role of the study in identifying specific transportation improvements that support the overall goals of developing a *Livable Community*.

"Develop a community-based transportation investment program at the activity and town center level that will identify capital projects, which can be funded in the annual TIP."

Pedestrian Environment:

Because every trip begins as a pedestrian trip, the walking experience within the Study Area is critical to understanding the current transportation system. There are sidewalks at several locations throughout the Study Area. MLK Drive even has sidewalks along both sides. However, the utility of the MLK Drive and other sidewalks is compromised by the large number of access points (side streets, driveways, etc.).

Issues:

Workshop participants and the Study Team identified areas where sidewalks are needed, including:

- Burton Road from Linkwood Road to Westland Boulevard
- Peyton Place along Isabella Gates Park
- Westland Boulevard from Burton Road to MLK Drive
- Linkwood Road
- Peyton Road
- MLK Drive from Peyton Road to Peyton Place
- Lynhurst Drive, south of Westridge shopping center
- Hedgewood Drive

¹ Held on Tuesday July 9th 2002 from 6:30 – 8:30 at the Grace Covenant Baptist Church (30 H.E. Holmes Drive)

In addition to the construction of sidewalks workshop participants would like to create guidelines for this infrastructure. In particular, the sidewalks should be wider than they are presently and should be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Lighting underneath I-20 on H.E. Holmes Drive also needs to be expanded to improve pedestrian safety.

Opportunities:

Opportunities exist to expand upon the existing pedestrian system and proposed pedestrian improvements. This is particularly true along MLK Drive, where a continuous sidewalk exists and funds have already been identified in the Comprehensive Development Plan to address additional streetscape improvements by 2007.

Sidewalks and streetscapes could also be improved on other streets to provide a safe, convenient way to access businesses and public transit.

Bicycle Facilities:

Bicycles are an increasingly important means of transportation, particularly for low-to-middle income families. Any well-balanced transportation system must include bicycle facilities to ensure a range of mobility options.

Issues:

The community believes that bicycles are important. Traffic moves quickly along MLK Jr. Dr., and a safe place to ride is needed. In addition, safe, sturdy racks are needed to store bikes when not in use.

Opportunities:

The Study Area is home to several bicycle routes identified in the Atlanta Commuter On-Street Bike Plan. This comprehensive network of bicycle facilities includes the Greenbriar trail from Greenbriar Mall to the H.E. Holmes MARTA station and the Lionel Hampton trail. Future plans for improving the area include bicycles route on H.E. Holmes Drive, Peyton Place, Linkwood Road and Lynhurst Drive. A bike lane is also programmed for MLK Drive from Downtown to the City limits by 2017. There is also opportunity to install convenient bike racks and review greenway options.



Transit:

The Study Area is well served by both bus and rail transit. The H.E. Holmes MARTA station is the terminus for the West rail line. A kiss-and-ride facility, as well as 1,419 parking spaces, and 17 bus routes serve the station, including MARTA and Cobb Community Transit (CCT) buses. The station serves approximately 270,000 passengers per month.

Issues:

Workshop participants and the Study Team noted that ridership on most bus routes seems to be low. This may be partially due to the pedestrian-hostile character of the Study Area and its disperse land uses. Because of this, buses are often not full at off-peak hours. According to workshop participants, smaller busses would be less intrusive to neighborhoods.

Opportunities:

The connection of the neighborhood to the MARTA rail station could be enhanced. The existing pedestrian entrance on Holmes Dr. could to be made more prominent, and a pedestrian entrance needs to be re-established on MLK Drive. Additionally, the establishment of uses on the MARTA property could create activity around the MARTA station.

Route Number	Route Name
3	Auburn Avenue/ MLK. Drive
53	Grove Park
56	Adamsville
57	Collier Heights
59	Maynard Court
60	Hightower/Moores Mill Shopping Ctr.
61	Bowen Homes
66	Greenbriar/Lynhurst
73	Fulton Industrial
160	Boulder Park
164	Kimberly/Country Squire
165	Southwest Community Hospital
170	Brownlee/Ben Hill
173	South Fulton/ Westgate Park
201	Six Flags
CCT 30	Marietta
CCT 70	Cumberland Boulevard Transfer Ctr.



A closed connection on the MARTA property

Intersections:

Traffic flow is affected more by intersection operations than by street widths. As such, intersections must also be addressed as part of a well-balanced system.

Issues:

Several intersections within the study currently operate at an unacceptable level. Through the public input process, participants identified intersections that need to be improved, including:

- MLK Jr. Drive and Holmes Drive: This intersection is dangerous for pedestrians due to the lack of crosswalks, pedestrian signals, and the roadway configuration.
- Burton Road and Westland Boulevard: This is blind intersection. The over-grown greenery needs to be maintained. A blinking traffic signal would help to notify drivers of the nature of the intersection.
- Hollis Terrace and Burton Road: Drivers to not heed the stop sign at this location. An additional traffic control device may be needed.
- Harlan Road and MLK Jr. Drive
- Peyton Place and MLK Jr. Drive: This intersection could benefit from a stop sign on Peyton Place. It would also be helpful to slow traffic on MLK so that turns can be made from Peyton more easily.
- Linkwood Road and MLK Jr. Drive: Currently, a "stop here" sign exists. It is unclear as to where the stop line actually is. In addition, the greenery surrounding the sign needs to be maintained.
- Linkwood Road and Delmar Lane: The stop sign on the northwest corner of this intersection is hidden behind overgrown greenery.
- Holmes Drive and Burton Road: Congestion results from traffic generated by the High School on Holmes Drive. Again, signal timing needs to be improved to allow pedestrians enough time to cross the intersection.



Opportunities:

No current plans are in place to address intersection operations. However, numerous improvements can be made. Please refer to the Implementation Strategies section for further details.

Street Character:

The “character” of a street includes a variety of factors. The number of lanes, the role in a regional network, congestion, speeds, and other factors all impact how people perceive and respond to a street.

Issues:

The character of existing streets impacts their capacity to foster the creation of a walkable community. In determining land uses, the character of streets must be taken into consideration. The following summarizes the character of key streets in the Study Area and the challenges associated with them:

- **I-20:** I-20 is an east-west interstate facility serving commuter and intercity traffic to and from Atlanta. The westbound off ramp of I-20 provides access from the interstate to the Study Area and serves traffic to and from the MARTA station. As the H.E. Holmes station is currently the western most MARTA station, it serves as the first park-and-ride facility for Atlanta commuters who reside west of the City. Ingress and egress to I-20 currently occurs directly opposite the existing entrance to the MARTA station on Burton Road.
- **MLK Drive:** MLK Drive is an urban arterial with a 5-lane cross section (two lanes in each direction and a Two-Way-Left-Turn lane in the middle). It has a posted speed limit of 35 mph but generally exhibits speeds above 45 mph.
- **H.E. Holmes Drive:** H.E. Holmes Drive is an urban arterial with a 4-lane cross section (two lanes in each direction and a Two-Way-Left-Turn lane in the middle). It has a posted speed limit of 35 mph but generally exhibits speeds above 45 mph.
- **Peyton Road:** Peyton Road is a 2-lane undivided collector street that serves traffic to and from the residential areas south of the Study Area.
- **Westland Boulevard:** Westland Boulevard is a short, 2-lane undivided local street that provides access to a few commercial establishments but primarily connects MLK to Burton Road.
- **Peyton Place, Burton Road Linkwood Road, and Harlan Drive:** These roadways are 2-lane undivided local streets that primarily serve as direct access to adjacent residences. Linkwood Drive and Harlan Drive also serve as collectors providing access between other local streets and MLK Drive. In addition to serving residential traffic, Lynhurst Drive also provides access to the commercial development at the intersection with MLK Drive.

An additional issue affecting the character of a street is congestion. Congestion frequently occurs on H.E. Holmes Drive from James Jackson Parkway to the MARTA station. One cause of this is school bus loading and unloading that occurs in front of Douglass High School. Another congestion

issue involves the at-grade freight rail crossings. Long freight trains frequently cross the tracks, blocking automobile traffic for several minutes at a time.

Opportunities:

The character of streets can be improved over the long-term through drastic transformations. Streetscape projects and reconfigurations can help. Smaller measures to ease congestion can help too. To this extent, opportunities exist to find an alternative location to conduct school bus loading and unloading, reducing the amount of blockage in the through-traffic lanes on Holmes Drive.

Connectivity:

Connectivity is critical to a viable transportation system. The traffic congestion that the Atlanta region is so famous is partially due to the limited number of routes available for making trips. Accidents or other tie-ups on a single road can throw the whole system into paralysis.

Connectivity is also important for non-motorized transportation. A well-connected bicycle and transit system is essential to ensuring that bicyclist and transit riders have maximum mobility options. By increasing the number of routes available for all trips the transportation system can be made more stable and less prone to significant failures.

Issues:

The Study Area is characterized by a number of underdeveloped superblocks resulting in a low level of connectivity. This is particularly an issue within subdivisions and apartment complexes. This low level of connectivity not only makes pedestrian access difficult by increasing distances, it also forces all traffic onto a relatively small number of streets.

Connections to the Lionel Hampton Trail just south of the Study Area also needs to be expanded, if possible.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to increase connectivity through street construction, possibly at the following locations:

- Tee Road to Peyton Place
- Hedgewood Drive to MLK via existing stub-out
- Cox Drive to Peyton Road
- A street from Peyton Place (next to Gates Crossing) to Cox Drive
- A street between Lynhurst Drive and Harland Road through wooded lots.

- Streets as part of new development on and near the MARTA side to reduce vehicular reliance and MLK Drive and reduce the need for curb cuts.

While not all feasible, these options nevertheless demonstrate that the opportunity to increase street connectivity does exist.

Parking:

Parking is essential in the modern city, but parking must be carefully balanced with other considerations to avoid compromising a community's quality-of-life.

Issues:

Within the Study Area there is currently a surplus of parking in the greatly underutilized H.E. Holmes MARTA station lots. The area is also characterized by a number of expansive surface parking lots fronting strip commercial centers.

The location of parking on individual parcels through the Study Area is also an issue. Parking tends to be located in front of buildings. This sets buildings back from the street discourages walking by creating a pedestrian-hostile environment.

Current commercial and industrial zoning prohibits shared parking by right. All users must provide dedicated on-site spaces and any attempts to share must receive approval of the Zoning Board of Adjustments.

Opportunities:

Opportunities exist to create shared parking strategies to reduce the amount of area dedicated to surface parking in the Study Area. Supportive zoning must be a part of this strategy.

Additionally, a more balanced transportation plan and mix of uses could reduce the need for high parking ratios and allow parking to be redeveloped. Where still needed, parking could also be located to be less obtrusive.

Safety:

Transportation safety is affected by a variety of factors. Street design, speeding and traffic flow affect vehicular transportation safety, while pedestrian safety is affected differently by these same factors. In general, however, conditions which are safe for pedestrians are also safe for drivers.

Issues:

Vehicular speed along several of the roads in the Study Area is of concern to the participants. Excessive speed not only makes it difficult to cross streets, it also detracts from the neighborhood setting this process is trying to help provide.

The geometry of streets encourages speeding. Many streets in the Study Area were designed to encourage the very speeds that have become a problem.

Opportunities

Workshop participants identified opportunities to improve safety through physical design. Many are interested in installing traffic calming devices in the Study Area, especially on MLK Jr. Drive. On MLK Jr. Drive, these could be geared towards psychologically narrowing the street through special median pavers and plantings. On other streets, more conventional methods could be applied.

Programmed Projects

The City of Atlanta has current policies, programs and projects directly affecting the Study Area. These are as follow:

Comprehensive Development Plan Projects:

- Pedestrian Facilities: MLK Jr. Dr from Ralph David Abernathy to City Limit- \$800,000
- Street Reconstruction: Southwest Atlanta Plan- MLK Jr. Dr Realignment
- Street Widening & Upgrade: MLK Jr. Dr. from Bolton Road to West Lake Avenue
- Bicycle Facilities: Lynhurst Dr. from MLK Jr. Dr. to Cascade Rd & MLK Jr Dr from H.E. Holmes MARTA station to City Limits

Capital Improvements Program Projects:

- MLK Jr. Dr. Improvements: Realignment of road between Holmes Drive and Lamar Dr- \$3,200,000

Quality of Life Bond Projects:

- MLK Jr. Dr. Streetscape- \$1,402,500

2003-2005 TIP:

- MLK Jr. Dr. Corridor Study, from Northside Dr. to City Limits- \$250,000
- MARTA West Line draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS)-\$1,000,000

Land Use

Although the Study Area itself is marked by the typical suburban development pattern of segregated uses, extreme setbacks, and a general lack of connectivity, it is bounded on the east by the western-most extent of Atlanta's traditional, pre World War Two development patterns. As such, an opportunity to extend this fabric westwards exists.

The other residential communities surrounding the Study Area exhibit typical suburban development patterns, with cul-de-sac single-family subdivisions served by strip commercial corridors. However, the area does contain a fair number of apartment complexes in different price ranges and a significant amount of senior housing.

Incompatible Land Uses:

The relationship of land uses impacts the quality of life in a community. As the benefits of mixed-use areas become known, it becomes increasingly important to understand the types of uses that can operate in close proximity. Many uses are very compatible, including retail, office, open space, civic and residential uses. Other uses, such as industrial and transportation services, are more difficult to reconcile with other uses in a mixed-use setting.

Issues:

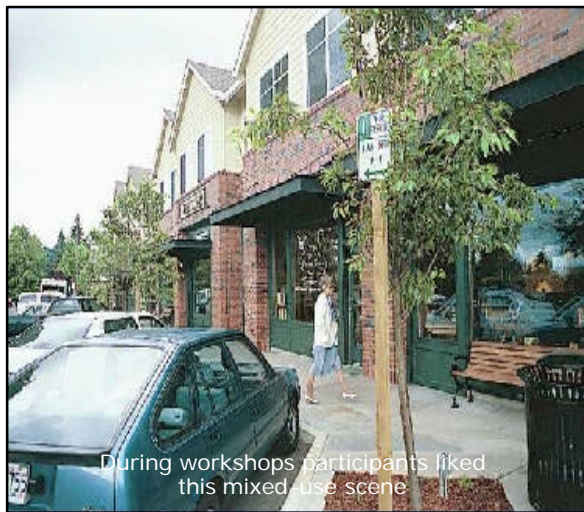
Within the H.E. Holmes Study Area, land use conflicts occur at the interface of the area's industrial properties. The former cabinet factory on Burton Road (now a tire facility) fronts a single-family residential street and is the area of which many residents are least proud.

Opportunities:

Land uses are not static, and industrial areas can be redeveloped to better respond to surrounding uses. The former cabinet factory is one such area that could be redeveloped.

Mixed-Use Developments:

Mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods can be defined by different uses in closely related but separate buildings. More beneficial, however, is the location of different uses within the same building. Typically, retail uses can occupy the sidewalk level of commercial or residential buildings without significantly compromising the operation of either use. Not only does such a mix locate customers close to retail, but it also creates a permanent residential presence in what would otherwise be a commercial area.



Issues:

The Study Area lacks a mixture of uses in close proximity; this discourages walking. Workshop participants identified several areas that they would like to see become mixed-use, including:

- Existing commercially zoned properties within the Study Area.
- Both sides of MLK Drive across from the MARTA station.

Opportunities:

Current commercial sites represent the potential for future mixed-use buildings. Infill development and supportive zoning could encourage the gradual development of mixed-uses.

Open Space:

Open spaces can take a variety of shapes, including plazas, greenway trails, pocket parks, or large active recreational parks. In addition to providing locations for relaxation, public open spaces can serve as community focal points or gathering spaces.

Issues:

With the exception of the Isabelle Gates Park on Peyton Place and Peyton Road, the open space that currently exists in the area is privately owned.



Stands of lush trees are one of the community's greatest assets. However, much of this green space is underutilized and/or poorly maintained. In fact, the greenery along the freight rail right-of-way is in particularly poor shape, frequently strewn with garbage.

Opportunities:

The City of Atlanta currently owns two parcels that could be developed into formalized open spaces (northeast corner of MLK Drive and Linkwood Road and on Peyton Place near the MLK Drive intersection). An additional location for formalized open space could be an area in the Dogwood Apartment Complex on Peyton Road.

In order to maintain the "green" quality that many residents want to preserve, there is the opportunity to create new parks in mixed-use and residential areas. There is also an opportunity to create quality green supplemental zones between new residential buildings and the streets, in place of parking. While they would not be parks, these areas could preserve the "green" quality that many want.



Vacant Land:

Vacant land in an urban setting is undesirable. Not only does it create public safety concerns, but it also contributes to visual blight.

Issues:

The Study Area has several vacant properties, including dilapidated buildings, which are eyesores.

Opportunities:

Vacant land represents development opportunities. Under-utilized lots could be developed as new shops, business, housing, and park space.

